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The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I: The Rock
of the Marne

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
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In partial fulfillment
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Master of Arts in History

by
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Marne

ABSTRACT

The American Expeditionary Forces in World War I: The Rock
of the Marne

by

Stephen Coode

American participation in the First World War developed slowly throughout 1917 to a mighty torrent during the last six months of the war. United States participation undoubtedly helped not only repel but to stop all German assaults on the Western Front: it had substantially aided in defeating Imperial Germany.

Through primary and secondary sources a timeline, as well as a few of the more significant events, has been established following the United States' involvement in the war. Special attention has been focused on the United States Third Infantry Division and its part in the July 15-17, 1918 Second Battle of the Marne.

The Third Infantry Division would see the war throughout its remaining battles and aid in the occupation of Germany. However, it is most famous for the Marne battle.

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
Chapter	
1. TRAINING AND PREPARATION, A.E.F'	4
2. ROCK OF THE MARNE	24
3. FINAL BATTLES	56
REFERENCES	68
VITA.....	71

CHAPTER 1

TRAINING AND PREPARATION, A.E.F.

Formally declared by the United States Congress on 6 April 1917, war against the Imperial German government and its military forces, for the United States, would be a war unlike America theretofore had ever prosecuted. In 1917 Germany had once again begun its unrestricted submarine warfare, resulting in severed ties between the United States and Germany: the German ambassador in Washington, Count von Bernsdorf, was dismissed and unless Germany was willing to halt its submarine forces President Wilson would refuse further negotiations. Due to the German High Commands opinion of the U.S. being weak and inefficient---it refused to restrict its submarines---it had unknowingly sown its demise.

As a result of the illegal British blockade of Germany, the German High Command in February 1915 promulgated a blockade of its own around the British Isles. Since the U.S. had strong economic ties with Great Britain, it was likely there would be in the future a U.S. confrontation with Germany. Germany viewed the sinking of merchant vessels as self defense due to the manner in which Great Britain detained ships: if Great Britain could stop commerce and trade by blocking neutral countries shipping

with Germany, the Germans could do the same with countries trading with Great Britain. However, Germany had been forewarned by the U.S. that if any U.S. shipping or the lives of its citizens were lost due to German interference, the U.S. would hold Germany directly accountable for such losses. The U.S. would suffer losses of shipping and its citizens, notably the Lusitania in 1915, for the next two years. The entrance of the United States in World War I can therefore be directly linked to the German High Command's failure in restricting its unrestricted submarine warfare against American shipping, the Zimmerman Telegram of February 1917, and the ever increasing mortality rate of American sea merchants.

In late April 1917, British and French leaders sailed to the United States for talks with American government officials concerning America's active participation in the war. The American effort was paramount to Allied success: the weary French troops and a shortage of British manpower at the close of 1917, as well as their lack of reserves and resources, made clear their ill equipped forces could not meet the demands of another year of warfare on the Western Front. All parties involved agreed the U.S. must do something to lessen the strain on the Allies and in May 1917 General John J. Pershing was selected to command the

American Expeditionary Force.¹ Pershing was, at the outset and without exception, given full and total control of the AEF: it would not be Washington, Paris, or London commanding the Americans, it would be only Pershing.² President Wilson and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker would provide Pershing full directives as how best to conduct the AEF; essentially, Pershing would have full discretion on how best to use American troops to implement those directives.

Pershing's extensive command authority by necessity, however, dictated that he must cooperate with the French and British governments as well as their field commanders; and not just with the French and British but his overall mission was to cooperate with all Allied countries in their functions against Imperial Germany. First, though, General Pershing would need the necessary manpower to fill the fledgling AEF.

Before 1917 the U.S. armed forces was nowhere near the 500,000 men the Selective Service Act, passed on 19 May 1917 called for; upon entering the war the regular army of the U.S. was composed of roughly 130,000 men and the

¹ Thomas Fleming, "Iron General," in *The Great War: Perspectives on The First World War*, ed. Robert Cowley (New York: Random House, 2003), 411.

²Thomas G. Frothingham, *The American Reinforcement in The World War* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1927; reprint, 1971), 77.

National Guard contained around 67,000 troops. The SSA called for an army of 500,000 men and, if needed, more men would be made available through the draft. With voluntary enlistments and the ongoing draft the U.S. armed forces, by the end of hostilities in November 1918, would reach 4,000,000 men. The enlargements of the Regular U.S. Army as well as the National Guard were the primary reasons for the SSA. Nevertheless, the 4,000,000 combined U.S. servicemen at war's end are simply astonishing: the American people's willingness to take part in the war---to voluntarily fill the ranks of a badly needed military force--was unprecedented in U.S. history.³

Started in 1915 by General Leonard Wood, the Plattsburg Plan was initiated for the training of the volunteers; surprisingly, most of the men who volunteered were professionals and businessmen. Some of the professional soldiers tasked with training those men were veterans of the recent campaign in Mexico; both regular Army and National Guardsmen, commanded by Pershing, had been sent to the Texas-New Mexico border with Mexico to repel border crossings and raids by Mexican bandits. The benefits of these experiences for the building and training

³Girard Lindsley McEntee, *Military History of The World War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 368-369.

of a large national defense force were immediately apparent: the improved efficiency of the regular Army as well as the National Guard would greatly aid in the training of the volunteers and, moreover, increased the morale of the fighting men. As will be shown later, the camaraderie and morale of America's fighting men would be put to the test when Operation Michael, the great German offensive of spring 1918, would bring the U.S. Third Infantry Division face to face with a powerful German army.

Aside from the above stated informal directives from Secretary of War Newton D. Baker about how Pershing was to assume his duties, a more formal set of instructions from Baker followed on 26 May 1917:

In military operations against the Imperial German Government you are directed to cooperate with the forces of the other countries employed against the enemy; but in so doing the underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved. This fundamental rule is subject to such minor exceptions in particular circumstances as your judgment may approve. The decision as to when your command or any of its parts is ready for action is confided to you, and you will exercise full discretion in determining the manner of cooperation. But until the forces of the United States are, in your judgment, sufficiently strong to warrant operations as an independent command, it is understood that you will cooperate as a component of whatever army you may be assigned to by the French Government.⁴

⁴U.S. Historical Division, Department of The Army: Office of Military History, *United States Army in The World War, 1917-1919*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948), 3.

The Third United States Infantry Division originated in North Carolina, its troops arriving from eleven different posts throughout the U.S. Totaling in excess of 27,714 men and officers by 18 September 1918, the 3rd ID was at the apex of its divisional capabilities: it would never again exceed that number throughout the war.⁵ It must be remembered that the U.S./AEF divisional strength and organization far exceeded those of the French and British. The typical Continental differences in divisional strength were---and rightly so---a major concern for the Allied commanders. A single American Infantry Division, 28,000 men and officers, posed serious problems to the logistics and supply network already established in France: a single division alone would consume enormous quantities of supplies, require a vast network of supply lines and transportation, and need large port facilities as well as bases and access to railroads. Therefore, the American reliance on French artillery, airplanes, and other weapons and supplies caused considerable logistical problems at the onset of American involvement.

The French and British armies had set timetables and formulae based on the size of their divisions. The

⁵Gaul, Jeffrey. *History of The Third Infantry Division: Rock of The Marne* (Kentucky: Turner Publishing, 1988), 12.

unusually large American formations disrupted these calculations: for example, how long it would take a division to march a certain number of miles, using a certain length of road; the number of railroad cars needed for the transport of an entire American division; and, possibly the most important factor, the logistical concerns of supplying an entire AEF division. Despite French and British demands to Baker concerning the size of U.S. divisions, Baker, believing Pershing to be competent, not to mention Commander in Chief in France, "would not deviate from a principle [Pershing's proposed divisional strength] which he knew was sound."⁶

As previously mentioned, the Third United States Infantry Division was a hodgepodge of army units from posts throughout the U.S. Of the 27,714 men and officers comprising the 3rd, the infantry was broken down into the 5th and 6th Brigades and further divided into the 4th and 7th Infantry Regiments as well as the 9th Machine Gun Battalion. There were artillery units, as well: the 10th Field Artillery Regiment (75mm) from Arizona as well as the 76th from Hattiesburg, Mississippi and the 105mm Artillery Unit from Texas. Topping off the field artillery units was a

⁶Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker: America at War*, vol. 1 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1931), 255.

trench mortar battery and, finally, the 7th Machine Gun Battalion, 5th Field Signal Battalion, and the 6th Engineer and Headquarters unit. The Sixth Engineers were the first of the division to arrive in France and, ironically, would be the first troops of the division engaged in combat on the continent: engineers, theoretically, were not usually the first to go into combat.⁷

On 28 May 1917 General Pershing left the U.S. and headed for Paris. Accompanied by a small staff he set up his headquarters in Paris, where he went to work planning the overall combined effort the AEF was to play in the war. Visualizing that the AEF would eventually number around three million men on the continent, he set about planning how to organize, train, house, and maintain the forces he envisioned taking to the fight. But first he had to find a solution for the transport of such a large force and, moreover, had to factor into that equation the British and French resources available at the time. When the U.S. entered the war, she was not a leading naval power: the French and British dominated the earth's oceans. In a cablegram he sent on 6 July 1917 Pershing evaluated, in part:

⁷Gaul, 12.

Plans should contemplate sending over at least 1,000,000 men by next May....Inasmuch as question affects all allies whose common interests demand that we exert maximum military power consistent with transport problem, suggest early agreement be reached among Allies which would provide requisite transportation.⁸

Soon after arriving in France Pershing proposed to the U.S. War Department his recommendation for the overall organization and logistics of the AEF. Four specific projects comprised the organizational recommendation: 1) the General Organizational Project, 2) Service of the Rear Project, 3) the Tank Project and 4) the Schedule of Priority of Shipments. The above cablegram indicates the urgent need for immediate approval of the recommendation, which was given on 11 July 1917. Upon completion of a joint study, headed by Colonel Chauncey Baker and including staff officers of Pershing's top subordinate commanders, as well as the War Department as a whole, the final outcome was an organized, balanced American force suitable for fighting a modern war.⁹

The first major contingent of the AEF set sail for Europe on 12 June 1917. Led by General William L. Sibert, the First Expeditionary Division would provide the basis for an American army that by the end of the war would constitute forty-three American divisions. Thirty-two camps

⁸U.S. Historical Division, vol. 1, 4.

⁹*Ibid.*

would be established throughout the U.S. for mobilization and training purposes; from medical personnel to machine gunners, training policy was set in 1917 for a period of sixteen weeks. What astonished Pershing about the training the men were receiving was that there was at first no emphasis on individual rifle marksmanship, and that it was geared for small-unit training with no provisions for training as a combined, large-unit arms team. Moreover, training was emphasized in trench warfare. For Pershing and his desire for mobile, non-static combat, trench warfare training simply would not do: the American soldier needed mobility, traversing barbed-wire and pushing the enemy from his trenches and fighting them in open space with bayonet and rifle, if he were to succeed in his fight against the Boche.¹⁰ The need for mobilizing the American forces was only one significant dimension of America's involvement in the war: the mobilization of the American economy in time of war was another. However, the economy would prove much more difficult to mobilize than would the American forces.¹¹

The Council of Defense was formed in 1916 after the National Defense Act was enacted the same year: a concern of American military thought for over a century,

¹⁰"Passing Troops Over Wire Entanglements," File 203-53. RG 120.

¹¹U.S. Army Center of Military History, "The U.S. Army in World War I, 1917-1918" (6 March 2008) www.history.army.mil/books/amh-v2/PDF/chapter01.pdf (accessed 9 September 2006).

mobilization and training of American manpower and industry was not necessarily new to the military---or economic---leadership. The War Industries Board replaced the outdated Munitions Standard Board, made up of civilian as well as military representatives for the purpose of coordinating, prioritizing, creating new industry as well as converting the existing manufacturing companies to a wartime status, and producing materials for the army and the navy. Bernard Baruch would lead the War Industries Board in expediting the much needed economic and industrial might of the United States.

Even with the tremendous effort by Baruch to coordinate and encourage the production and development of weapons, the demand for those weapons was so great and immediate that, consequently, the AEF would depend heavily on Allied (especially French) weapons, particularly tanks, airplanes, and artillery. However, small and individual arms productions in the United States as well as uniform and food distribution methods were much more successful in supplying the AEF. Many top military officials, such as Major General George W. Goethals, relied heavily on businessmen-turned-soldiers like Charles G. Dawes and

William W. Atterbury¹², the A.E.F.'s General Purchasing Agent in Europe and supervisor of the A.E.F.'s transportation system, respectively.¹³

Pershing moved his General Headquarters in September 1917 to Chaumont where, centrally located to where the planned American Front lines would presumably be established, he and his staff would supervise the training of American troops. By the Fall of 1917, there were four divisions----the 1st, 2nd, 26th, and 42nd---as well as a brigade of U.S. Marines in France and all needed, among other things, trench, chemical, demolition, mortar, and grenade training. As mentioned above, the entire AEF would need advanced bayonet and rifle training. Men such as Corporal James B. Gresham, Private Thomas F. Enright, and Private Merle D. Hay might have survived, had they received proper training, a German raid on a trenchline they shared with their French allies, but they did not: they were the first three deaths of the AEF's campaign in Europe.¹⁴

On 21 March 1918 Chateauvillain was designated as headquarters of the U.S. Third Infantry Division. Known as the Ninth Area for Billeting and Training, it was made

¹²Army and Navy, "Pershing's A.E.F" (11 May 1931)
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,741623,00.html>
(accessed 15 February 2008).

¹³U.S. Army Center of Military History, 23-24.

¹⁴U.S. Army Center of Military History, 21-26.

available to the 3rd ID as an area of concentration for training the division's troops. The area encompassed 300 square miles, contained some lowland as well as high ground, and occupied the west-central territory of Haute-Marne, located some 10 miles west of Chaumont where the AEF headquarters was located. As means of transport and equipment became available, and coupled with the arrival of troops, means of organization, training, and instruction began to give the division a semblance of a cohesive fighting force.¹⁵ Command of the division was entrusted to Major General Joseph T. Dickman. Back in the U.S., Dickman had commanded Camp Greene in North Carolina and was promoted to command the 3rd ID in late November, 1917. Before the war he was present with Pershing in Cuba in 1898, and later was Inspector General on Pershing's staff; he was an instructor for several military schools teaching organization, strategies and tactics, and military history. Overall, Dickman was well prepared for his eventual participation in Europe in April, 1918.¹⁶

The 4th, 7th, 38th, and 30th infantry regiments of the 3rd ID arrived by 21 April and a final schedule for the full training of the division arrived from army headquarters on

¹⁵Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), 36-38.

¹⁶John J. Pershing, foreword to *The Great Crusade*, by Joseph T. Dickman (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1927), vii-viii.

the 28th. In poor condition and looking haggard, horses from the French Army arrived for divisional use on 2 May; in order to bring the horses to operational use, items such as housing (stables), food, water, and other necessities vital for the health and maintenance of the very important animals were needed. Unimportant to untrained eyes, the horses were valuable as a means to wage an early 20th century war. Moreover, the accomplishments of the 3rd ID in regard to their treatment and training of their horses, as well as the speedy construction of the animals' facilities, were two not insignificant achievements of the division that was to make its reputation as the 'Rock of The Marne'. Continued favorable weather conditions of those early days in France permitted the division's training to progress smoothly; this was fortunate for the French and British, being beaten back as they were during the German Michael Offensive launched back in March.

For the 3rd ID the sequence of events now became rapid. The division, premised on the assumption of trench warfare training, was to be moved to a quiet sector near Toul; on 28 May it was to relieve the U.S. 28th Division at Boucq. By the 31st it had been recalled to the Vosges, between Thann and St. Die. The Germans tempestuous progress toward and approaching the Marne River would necessitate yet another

move for the division: the move would take the 3rd to immediate field service and combat, as will be discussed later in the narrative.¹⁷

In his book, Dickman shared his thoughts concerning the Allied position and how they planned to use American soldiers within their own armies: "...Upon landing in England, March 13, 1918...the question was already a year old." He continues:

According to the original plan we were to send over thousands of expert workmen to labor for the French; and such soldiers as we might send were to be put into French battalions, losing their identity...and being controlled entirely by French officers...

To suppose that liberty-loving Americans would take kindly to serving in a subordinate capacity in a foreign country, in a foreign uniform and under a foreign flag, with foreign officers commanding them in an unknown language, was going far.

During a conference in March 1918 at Abbeville, aware of the new German drive of the 21st, Pershing allowed some flexibility of American troops but never wavered from his static policy of an independent American Army. In the end the conferees of the meeting agreed that "It is the opinion of the Supreme War Council that in order to carry out the war to a successful conclusion, an American Army should be

¹⁷Dickman, 44-47.

formed as soon as possible under its own commander and under its own flag."¹⁸

General Pershing met with a delegation from Paris first in the U.S. and again a few months later upon his arrival in France in June 1917; both meetings centered on the question of how American troops could best be used; however, the meeting in France was slightly altered. The original plan called for transporting from the U.S. to France thousands of skilled workers for employment by the French; also included in the provision was a plan to send U.S. combat troops for the sole purpose of reinforcing French battalions, to bring them up to their regular battalion strength. The British requested similar deployments from the AEF. What was neither debatable nor questionable in Pershing's opinion was that, after being deployed and enveloped by British and French armies, American troops would almost certainly lose their identity while under the command of British and French officers. For Dickman, the British and French demands were seen as having a total lack of respect for the American Army and "the dignity of the American nation and of an imposition on our good nature." He goes on to say:

¹⁸Dickman, 255-259.

Vast financial and material assistance had already been rendered to the Allies under very 'benevolent' neutrality. Although thus encouraged, it still required a good deal of assurance to make a proposal so far from flattering to our national pride, especially on the part of the British, who did not use soldiers from other parts of their Empire, as little prepared for war as we were, namely, Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders, to fill up the depleted ranks of their Tommies.¹⁹

While most diligently appealing for the systemization of an exclusive AEF which, incidentally, could not be intelligently refuted, Pershing's goals were to be postponed due to a German offensive that began in March, 1918. Pershing's relentless goal of an exclusive AEF would be, as a first step, secured under the London Agreement. The agreement, enacted 24 April 1918, stipulated that upon the completion of U.S. Army Division and Corps training they shall be organized, used, and commanded by Americans. The Supreme War Council agreed that the U.S. should, as soon as possible, form its own army under its own command and flying its own flag. Prior to the London Agreement, on 6 March 1918, the chief of the French mission with the American Army, General Ragueneau, issued his own report regarding the formation of an entirely independent American Army:

¹⁹Ibid.

Another consequence of this state of mind is that all the Americans contemplate the formation of an army purely American, without mixture with the other Allies. They are unanimous on this point...They do not wish to hear any talk about an amalgamation in which the American Army would lose its personality. They are all opposed to it and are supported by American public opinion...

The last instructions from Washington are too positive, and correspond too closely to the unanimous sentiment of the American people and their Army, for us to be able to do anything by insisting: we would only develop a useless tension.²⁰

After General Max von Boehm's Seventh Army destroyed three French divisions at Chemin de Dames on 27 May 1918 there was, again, a mass exodus of people fleeing Paris. This emergency, even in the face of the London Agreement, allowed Foch (Commander in Chief of the Supreme War Council) to take immediate, albeit temporary, control of American forces. This development pushed the European commanders to contact Washington directly, through their respective governments, to try and persuade the U.S. Government to turn over their forces to Foch's control and even, if possible, to have Pershing removed as AEF Commander.

The French commander's insistence on overall command, however, proved to be futile. As at the very outset of U.S. involvement, U.S. leaders were unwavering in their stance

²⁰Dickman, 258-259.

of an independent AEF. The emergency did not call for Foch's temporary command over some U.S. divisions, which were scattered for miles among French and British troops; the move benefited no Allied army and provided the AEF with no significant instructions and only added to further dispersion of U.S. troops. The day would come, however, when AEF troops would be fighting under their own flag and following the orders of American commanders.²¹

Realizing in early 1918 that the unrestricted submarine warfare, indiscriminately relaunched in February 1917, was not working and had indeed failed, Ludendorff and Hindenburg, wrongly assuming it would take the United States at least six months to arrive in *force* on the European mainland, concluded that it was time either to defeat the Entente---once and for all---or be defeated themselves. Ludendorff and Hindenburg, preparing a final plan for a decisive strike, had several reasons to foresee a successful outcome. The Russian revolution made available the immediate transfer of German manpower to the Western Front; the Italian's miserable showing at Caporetto forced the British and French to send troops to stabilize the Italian front; the so called French mutinies of 1917 reduced French effectiveness; massive British losses at

²¹Dickman, 260-261.

Passchendale in 1917 had produced a crisis in the British war effort; and, in general, a serious decline in Allied manpower were all good reasons the German high command had for launching a final, all out assault on the Western Front.

Tim Travis, a contributing author in Hew Strachan's *World War I: A History*, opines on the Allied victories on the Western Front and how, in six critical places, "The Allied victories on the western front in 1918 really occurred." He continues:

These were, first, halting the massive German 1918 Spring offensives; secondly, mounting the decisive French counter-offensive at the Marne on 18 July; thirdly, the successful Australian/Canadian/British Amiens offensive of 8 August; fourthly, the continuing arrival of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF); fifthly, the sweeping allied Offensives of late September; and lastly, the final allied pursuit of the retreating German army in October and early November, leading to the armistice of 11 November 1918.²²

²² Hew Strachan, *World War I: A History* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 278.

CHAPTER 2

ROCK OF THE MARNE

Appearing behind the forward positions of the German 1st Army, just Northeast of Reims, Kaiser Wilhelm on the evening of 14 July 1918 was awaiting the German H-Hour to cross the Marne River: a German surprise attack with Paris as its objective. However, there was to be no such surprise at all. In the mid-evening of the 14th a company of French infantry made a daring raid across no-mans-land and straight into German forward posts, bagging twenty-seven German prisoners and, most importantly, intelligence documents stating times and places of impending German attacks. Word of the imminent attack was passed up and down the Allied front line via runners and telephone, passing along the urgent message to command posts and elements of the French Fourth Army. There would be no German surprise attack. Comprised of the German 10th and 36th Divisions of the German Seventh Army, the most concentrated and heaviest attack would fall upon the American Third Infantry Division and the French 125th Division, which was to the right of the U.S. 3rd ID.²³ The attack of 15 July 1918 marked the last major German offensive of the war; from 18 July until the

²³ Joseph Gies, *Crisis 1918* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974), 204-205.

Armistice, the Allied forces would assume all subsequent offensives.²⁴

Throughout 1917 Allied commanders anticipated certain German offensives to begin in the spring and summer of 1918; the Germans, indeed, were preparing operational plans for a "Great Offensive" in the spring of 1918. Not to be a decisive, knockout blow, but instead to split the British and French forces and in the process deal a staggering defeat to the British, Operation Michael called for a series of five individual operations stretching across the northern part of the Western Front. The leading German commanders Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich von Ludendorff decided at a conference on 27 December 1917 for the go ahead to begin making preparations for the offensive with code names such as "George I" and "George II", "Mars", "Michael I, II, III", "Castor and Pollux" (Verdun), and "Strassburg"; the Germans launched the main attack, Michael, on 21 march 1918.²⁵ The initial drive was spearheaded by the German Third, First, Ninth, and Seventh Armies of the German Crown Prince Rupprecht's Army Group.²⁶

²⁴ U.S. Department of The Army: Office of Military History, *United States Army in The World War, 1917-1919*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948), 1.

²⁵ Girard Lindsley McEntee, *Military History of The World War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 467-468.

²⁶ U.S. Department of The Army: Office of Military History, 174.

By early summer the German drive had stalled at the approach to Paris.

By the first of July 1918, however successful (but not decisive) the first four German drives had been, political unrest and discontent in Germany thus far in the war was at its zenith. Not unaware of these political developments, the German military commanders realized full well the importance of victory on the fifth and final assault against the Marne salient. The German objective, besides maintaining the initiative and capturing French prisoners and material, was twofold: take the rail hub of Reims and thereby control the railway running southwest to Chateau-Thierry, giving the German army more room to maneuver and, the second, seize Paris.²⁷

By 15 July 1918 sixteen American divisions on the Western Front were disposed among various British and French armies along a line stretching from the English Channel through Montdidier to Chateau-Thierry; through Reims, Verdun, and the St. Mihiel Salient, ending at the Swiss frontier at Basel.²⁸ Six of these American divisions were in such a position to defend Paris via Chateau-Thierry. Around the same time in July American troops were

²⁷Eisenhower, 152.

²⁸Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), 79.

arriving in France at the rate of about 10,000 per day; theretofore a few of the A.E.F.'s divisions had seen some form of combat and proved their worthiness on the battlefield, while other AEF forces needed more time to be trained. After training they would be moved to a sector of the line where it was thought fighting would be imminent. Extracted information from captured German prisoners revealed an attack by the Boche was set to begin at midnight on the 15th; this pertinent information would lead to serious German casualties and resulted in further demoralization of the German invaders. These casualties were a result of a spoiling offensive by Allied batteries initiated around 11:50 p.m. on the 14th, just ten minutes before the German attack was set to begin.

What would later be known as the last major German offensive of the war opened up around 12:10 a.m. as German gas rounds and explosive artillery shells were fired onto Allied lines. The more than eighty German batteries facing the 3rd ID continued to fire up and down the front for more than three hours. Reaching as far back as seven miles in depth, German artillery was moved forward 300 yards to permit the first waves of German infantry to commence their attack, crossing in boats and under fire, trying to gain a foothold on the southern bank of the Marne. This

devastating German artillery continued, at different sections of the line at one time or another, for ten straight hours: rolling barrages commenced and around 3:50 a.m. as the German batteries, with distances of approximately 165 yards and time rotations from seven to twelve minutes, depending on the terrain, harassed the men of the 3rd ID with great effect.²⁹

Adding to the maddening artillery fire the first wave of enemy troops the 3rd encountered by no means consisted of reserve or green German soldiers. They were "shock troops", the original Stormtroopers: those troops who would harass and interdict who were young, tough, strong, and battle-hardened---the *Stosstruppen*.³⁰

In the fifth and last German offensive of Operation Michael, Ludendorff had two objectives in mind, the first being minimal compared to the second (possibly the most important objective of all five offensives). If things went well enough and according to his plan, Ludendorff believed the second objective---the capture of Paris---could be achieved only by seizing the Surmelin Valley. The valley, near the town of Moulin, was the only gap, running along the south bank of the Marne in an east-west direction,

²⁹Dickman, 81-82.

³⁰Dickman, 83.

capable of supporting a large modern army. It was in this valley where Major General Joseph Dickman's 3rd ID was holding the line, directly in front of Ludendorff. The United States Third Infantry Division was attached to General Jean DeGoutte's Fifth French Army and, with it, two Italian divisions plus the American 28th Division. The French Fifth Division was on Dickman's eastern flank; combined, these forces would play a highly significant part in that sector of fighting but, alone, the American 3rd ID would play a crucial role in the defense of the Surmelin Valley.³¹

Deploying the division on 30 May, Dickman skillfully positioned his forces in depth: he ordered two infantry regiments to the bank of the Marne that was closest to his position and held two more in reserve, where they would sometime later be moved up to the Marne to join the two infantry regiments already there. Dickman would follow up his defense by ordering the division's 4th Infantry Regiment to Chateau-Thierry; the 4th would later be joined by the 7th and 30th Infantry Regiments. Dickman placed the 38th Infantry at the point where the Surmelin River joined the Marne, in direct opposition to the German 10th Division. The 38th and

³¹John S.D. Eisenhower with Joanne Thompson Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of The American Army in World War I* (New York, et. al: The Free Press, 2001), 152.

30th, either by fate or by consequence, were the two infantry regiments of the 3rd ID that would eventually be tasked with holding the valley. These regiments, commanded by Colonel Ulysses Grant McAlexander and Colonel Edward Luther Butts, respectively, would be responsible for the division's leap into history.³²

Colonel Butts graduated from West Point in 1890, making him one of the youngest regimental commanders in the AEF. Detail oriented and thorough, he was respected by his colleagues and considered an icon by, and to, his troops. He had a professional and somewhat friendly relationship with McAlexander. These two commanders and their men would not only make the difference in halting the German advance, but also would make a lasting impact on the initially negative German opinions of not just the AEF as a whole, but on the individual spirit and fighting capabilities of the average American soldier.³³

Colonel U.G. McAlexander, West Point class of 1887, was known as a competent if not difficult commander; he originally was with the 1st Division where he commanded the 18th Infantry. Major Jesse Woolridge, commanding company G,

³²Eisenhower, 153.

³³Eisenhower, 153-154.

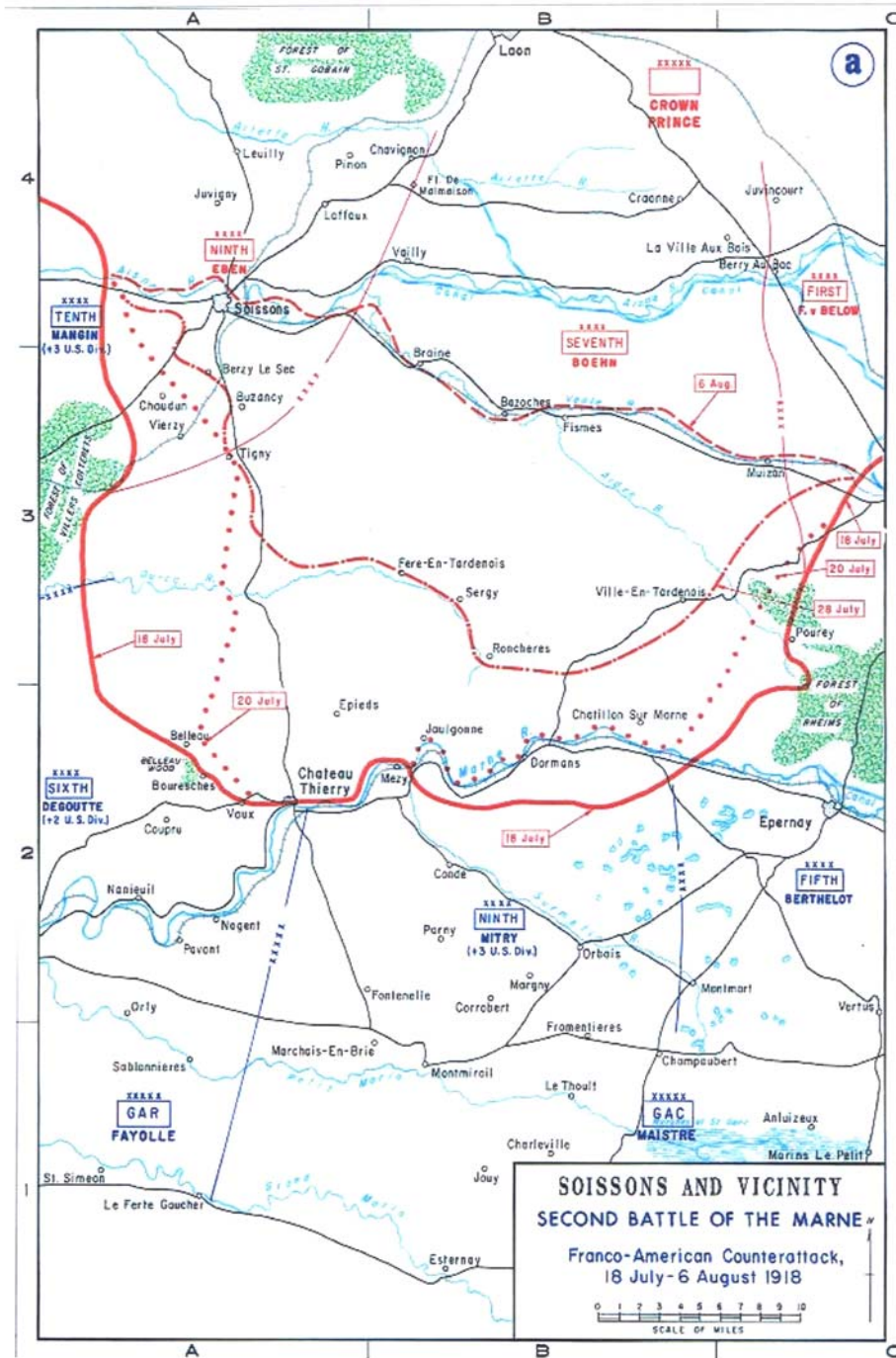


Figure 1: The Second Battle of the Marne.

Adapted from The United States Military Academy, Department of History, Department Maps, <http://www.dean.usma.edu/history/web03/atlas/index.htm>, 10 April 2008.

on the left of the Surmelin River and in front of the Paris-Metz road, would later write of McAlexander as being the "pre-eminent among the great battle leaders of all time."³⁴ Companies H & E, along with Wooldridge's G, held the first delaying positions and were deployed along the southern bank of the Marne. The first delaying position was directly in front of the German 6th Grenadier Guard, 4th and 398th Infantries of the German 10th Division. As previously mentioned the Germans used in their attack the *Stosstruppen*, which constituted the 6th Grenadiers, Kaiser Wilhelm's favorite shock troops.³⁵

Defense of the Surmelin Valley posed a difficult problem and it was here that not only McAlexander but also General Dickman would come into confrontation with the sector commander, General DeGoutte. Dickman surmised the best method of defending the valley, with its hills to the east and west and flat ground near the northern approaches to the Marne riverbank and Surmelin River, was with an "elastic defense" as opposed to a defense-in-force tactic. DeGoutte's order to stand and fight was a surprise to Dickman, for the French were the pioneers of the elastic defense maneuver: a weaker force nearer the front which,

³⁴Jesse W. Woolridge, *The Giants of The Marne* (Copyright: Jesse W. Woolridge, 1923), 103.

³⁵Woolridge, 36.

when pressed to its limit of fighting capability, would pull back toward the main force--further back---out of enemy artillery range. Dickman, disobeying DeGoutte's orders, instead formed a defense in depth and, in order to placate DeGoutte, slightly beefed up his very thin front line. What really mattered to Dickman was positioning troops on the hills of the valley, maintaining defensive positions on the heights, and trusting his own judgment about the defensive positions and postures of his men.³⁶

Around midnight on 14-15 July Colonel Georg Bruchmuller, chief of artillery for General von Hutier, both of them famous for developing the offensive tactics that had broken the trench stalemate, ordered artillery fire to commence, whereupon 6,400 German guns simultaneously sounded off. Gas shells whirled their way toward the Allied rear trenches as high explosive (HE) shells ground and pitted the earth up and down the Marne Front. On the German right (McAlexander's West), after an approximately three hour artillery preparation had ended, engineers and front line *Soldaten* began preparing to cross the Marne, pulling river boats and rafts from concealed positions. As Allied machine-gun fire intensified the German shock troops, amassed in the woods for the first

³⁶Eisenhower, 154.

wave of the assault, witnessed Allied fire that at times surpassed the fire of their own machine guns. In fact, the officer commanding the German 5th Grenadier Regiment sent a reconnaissance patrol to the front to assess the situation of the *Sturmstruppen* in that sector near the Marne Front: the 1st battalion of the 5th Grenadier Regiment, attacking the American 3rd ID, had been severely reduced by intense machine-gun fire as well as artillery and, as a result, a crossing of the river there was deemed impossible. This was a mere setback for the Germans, as the German 7th army crossed the Marne and occupied the Allies' first positions on the front.³⁷

Following the preemptive French artillery bombardment, the German 6th Grenadier Regiment (of the German 10th Division) at 0330 hours on 15 July attacked Woolridge's G Company along the river; first encountering stiff resistance the German 6th Grenadiers, after an hour of intense fighting with both Company G directly and indirect machine-gun fire from the 30th Infantry Regiment, managed to gain a foothold on the south bank of the Marne. In the process Woolridge's front platoon was all but destroyed. The remnants of his forces pulled back and began a fighting retreat to the railroad bank, when Woolridge moved up his

³⁷Gies, 205-208.

reserve platoons and buttressed the forward positions. Although G Company was forced back, the Germans paid a heavy price as the 3rd ID machine-gunners literally disintegrated the advancing German troops. Woolridge would later boast of his soldiers' accomplishments on killing the enemy as the German advance switched from "a soldiers maneuver into a military omelet."³⁸

The fifth offensive of Operation Michael would be the final and most concentrated of the German assaults, the last ditch effort of a desperate German army trying to bring about a successful end to the war. Since March the Germans had possessed the offensive and had badly demoralized British and French troops; it seemed, at least to Ludendorff and Hindenburg that if the German army was successful in this last major assault chances of complete victory would, at last, be at hand. Unlike their British and French counterparts and to a degree the AEF, morale in the German army reached a level not seen since the first year of the war: this too would pass, and rather quickly.³⁹

Major Guy I. Rowe commanded the Second Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, of the Third Infantry Division during the battle. A cool headed commander under fire,

³⁸Woolridge, 35.

³⁹Thomas G. Frothingham, *The American Reinforcement in The World War* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1927; reprint, 1971), 281.

knowledgeable in his understanding of leading men into battle and through fierce enemy opposition, Rowe was respected by his commanders and revered by his subordinates. Rowe believed it to be a useless task to try and train men in the necessities of fine soldering "unless confidence in the integrity of one another is developed at the same time."⁴⁰

An excellent system as well as a smart way in which to exert control over troops and operations, Major Rowe required all his captains to write nightly reports of their platoons' locations and operations: from the bottom up, McAlexander had complete control of the 38th Infantry Regiment. Major Woolridge, from an excerpt in his book concerning McAlexander's leadership skills, wrote that "genius is knowing what to do next; knowledge is knowing how to do it; and virtue is doing it." He goes on to explain what it was like during the opening phase of the battle, when the Germans attacked:

Out of a night as black as the mouth of hell they came. Eighty four German batteries...consolidated their fire on the Surmelin valley for four solid hours, with a fury never before equaled, according to French observers, not even at Verdun. Gone were the [French civilians]...fleeing before the scourge, with his high

⁴⁰Woolridge, 22.

explosive, shrapnel, poison gas, thermite, machine-guns and aeroplanes.⁴¹

The overall Allied command of the American 3rd ID was under the French Sixth Army, commanded by General DeGoutte; commanded by General Debeney the French XXXVIII Corps was in direct command of the division near the front, in the sector of Champagne-Marne. In its official history the United States Army writes of the Champagne-Marne battle:

The heaviest attack fell on the front of the American 3rd Division and the French division on its right (the 125th) which were in line on the south bank of the river, in and adjacent to the valley of the SURMELIN [*sic*] Creek. The attack here was made by the German 10th and 36th Divisions of the Seventh Army. They crossed the river and drove back the French, and were able to make but little progress against the American 6th Brigade, which consisted of the 38th Infantry (McAlexander) and the 30th Infantry (Butts). The 38th Infantry held its ground close to the river, although assailed on three sides at once. It has since been known as the Rock of the Marne. Fighting on this front was fierce throughout most of the day of July 15; on the 16th, offensive operations ceased all along the front. Having failed to capture REIMS or to hold their slight gains against the American 3rd Division, the Germans on the next day, July 17, gave over the attack and began a withdrawal.⁴²

In war there are, among others, battalion and platoon movements, flank and counter-flank movements, lines being constantly redrawn on maps, and generals who take the fight

⁴¹Woolridge, 32-33.

⁴²U.S. Department of The Army: Office of Military History, 1-2.

to the enemy. Also in war, on a more 'bottom-up', personal level, there are men whom commit personal acts of bravery, loyal and dedicated to their cause: as in previous American wars, World War I was no different. They came from all different parts of the U.S., spoke different languages, and were of mixed cultures: all those men put forth the character of the Doughboy in the blaze of battle. It is not the generals who fight the battles but instead it is the typical, average soldier; the young men who slug it out in the fields and hills and forests, who fight wars. These are the troops who determine the outcomes of battles, the outcome of wars.

Woolridge, in *Giants*, wrote of "the American fighting men in the heat of battle." He wrote of men remaining at their posts while all around them shells fell for hours, the sound deafening and the impact of artillery shells teeth shattering; soldiers on their bellies traversing fields to silence enemy machine-gun activity; men wresting weapons from the enemy and using the same weapons to silence them. There were men like Private Dickman, uncoordinated and spoke very little English, telling his comrades "go ahead and shoot 'em, they can't hurt you....Vatch, I get annoder"; and men like Sergeant Otto Wolz, severely wounded by shrapnel as he tried to rescue a

wounded comrade, remarking to his C.O. (before attempting the rescue), "I will probably not make it in the face of that [German] shelling, but I'll try it for a pal."⁴³

Woolridge also writes of the bravery he witnessed of enemy soldiers. As two U.S. soldiers were fighting on the first line of the front they were charged by enemy troops. One of the men was wounded in the head and the other was trying to dress it when "a [German] charge came over the top. Phillips seized Delsoldartos' rifle and bayoneted a Prussian officer, and then this officer...steadied his hand by pressing his elbow on the ground and in his dying gasp shot Phillips...through the brain." Another account involved Woolridge himself. As he ordered a German officer P.O.W. to hand over his papers, the officer "holding his papers beyond my reach slowly tore them to bits, all the while looking me straight in the eye with never a flicker of his eyelid...[The German P.O.W.] preferred to have his orders taken that way than on demand."⁴⁴

As a contribution to the history of the 3rd ID, Captain Fred S. Dever shared his experiences of the fighting at the Marne. Commissioned a First Lieutenant in 1917, Dever remained with the Third Division until the end of the war.

⁴³Woolridge, 48-60.

⁴⁴Woolridge, 49-62.

While attached to the 38th Infantry, he was tasked to dig trenches and construct wire defenses at the mouth of the Surmelin River, in the area of Moulin. "When the German bombardment began", begins Dever, "we had no idea that the enemy was attempting advance, believing that it was merely a bombardment." As hours passed---since the opening of German artillery fire---the bombardment stepped forward to the rear of the allied lines, to the rear of Devers' forward position. Dever reported that a fellow Lieutenant told him that "the Germans had crossed the Marne in front of the 30th Infantry, with the result that the 30th had taken a number of prisoners." Dever continues:⁴⁵

I then continued on toward Conningis, and, on arriving at the Paroy-Crezancy road, I met a soldier of the 30th....And he told me that the 30th Infantry was having 'A Hell of a lot [sic] of fighting and taking a lot of prisoners...' I started up on the road towards Mezy....I found Lieut. Gay and about fifty men. He told me that the Germans had crossed in force in front of the 30th. [sic] and that he was afraid the 30th. Had been shot up pretty bad, and quite a few taken [as] prisoners....During the night of July 15-16 we were moved to billets near St. Eugene and to the west of that town, where I remained for a day or two, when I took up work with the Detachment [sic] of policing the battlefield.

⁴⁵Report on the Second Battle of The Marne, July 15, 1918. File 203-33.01. RG 120. National Archives.

An undated, special report covers the events of the 3rd Division in its defense of the Marne as well as its counterattack. The report begins with the German attack on Chemin des Dames on 27 May, its success in overrunning territory as far south as the Marne and the subsequent, urgent actions taken by the Allies to halt the German advance. On 29 May the 3rd Division, moving from its training area from around Chateauvillian, took up forward positions along the south bend of the Marne River. The 7th Machine Gun Battalion of the 3rd Division was the first unit on the scene, participating in action during the night of 31 May, around Chateau-Thierry; for three days and nights, without reinforcement or supply, the 7th MG Battalion eventually stopped the German advance.

In the days and weeks that followed, more units and reinforcements arrived, such as the 4th, 7th, 30th, and 38th Infantry Regiments; the 8th and 9th Machine Gun Battalions; and the 10th, 18th, and 76th Field Artillery Battalions. In support of this massive arsenal of firepower were the 5th Forward Signal Battalion, 3rd Trench Mortar Battery, and the 6th Engineering Regiment. Also defending the line to the east of the 3rd Division was a small number (soon enlarged) of French corps artillery and half a French artillery brigade: this seemingly meager artillery support covered a

section of the front of over ten kilometers. The French support, during July 1-14, were exponentially increased and had a decisive affect on the morning of the 14th and 15th.⁴⁶

The same report describes events following the initial German attack on the morning of 14-15 July:

The German crossing was attempted a little before five o' clock on the morning of July 15, and until dark that evening the destruction of the German regiments designated to cross the River [sic] at four different points between the towns of GIAND and JAULGONNE [sic], constituted a continued performance.

Although the rush of the German troops overwhelmed some of the front-line positions, and these units and the machine-gun companies in some cases suffered a fifty percent loss, no German soldier crossed the main road from FOSSOY to CREZANCY, except as a prisoner of war, and by noon of the following day there were no Germans in the foreground of the 3rd Division Sector except the dead.

During the days from July 16-19, the Division [sic] remained in its sector on the Marne with its right flank regiment facing to the east, as a measure of self-protection against the German line which had crossed the MARNE from the east side of the JAULGONNE Bend to some point near CHATILLON. Finally on the morning of July 20, three French Divisions attacked the line only to find that the enemy had retired to the north side of the Marne on the previous night.

A report of 5 August 1918, written by Major Charles W. Foster, states that "four general lines of defense had been organized", but constructed "in a rather elemental stage."

⁴⁶Operations of The Third Division, July 15-31, 1918: The Second Battle of The Marne, "Special Report," File 203-33.6. RG 120. National Archives.

Notwithstanding the apparent weakness of the American forward defensive line, divisional orders held fast that all units must hold their respective positions and that any lost ground must be immediately retaken through counterattack. During the first part of July German artillery batteries, as witnessed by American observers, were receiving reinforcements. However, by the 14th, a decrease had been noted by A.E.F. F.O.'s (Forward Observers) that German artillery activity had decreased, yet their infantry activity had increased: a sure sign of imminent attack.⁴⁷

Due to the German prisoners' statements as to when the attack would commence, on 14 July the 3rd Division's artillery opened up with a preemptive gas attack around 11:30 p.m.: aware the Germans would attack around midnight, these preemptive bombardments were a definite necessity. At the initial phase of the German bombardment, different forms of gas were used: mustard gas was employed in the 3rd Divisions rear areas while other forms of gas were used in the forward areas where the German units would advance. A report of 21 July 1918 by the 3rd Division's gas officer, Major W.M. Somervall, details the areas of the battlefield

⁴⁷ Charles W. Foster, "Report of Operations 3rd Division, U.S.: July 14 to August 1, 1918," RG 120. National Archives.

where the Germans dropped their gas ordinance and, just as importantly, where they did *not* drop gas shells. Somervall wrote of the gas attack:

No gas in appreciable quantities was used on the slope toward the river Marne, and the few gas shells reported north of the Plateau [*sic*] may be considered accidents.

A count of shell holes in the shelled area indicates that about 1000 gas shells per sq. kilometer were used during the first three hours of the bombardment.

Gases used were Diphosgene, Chlopierin, Yperite, Diphenychloraraine, and Ethyldichlorarsine.

Mustard gas was used only on the area to the rear...Lethal lachramatory gases were freely used, however, in all rear areas.

Gas discipline in the various units was excellent...Respirators were quickly adjusted, men kept cool, and in spite of intense shelling with gas, shrapnel and H.E., lasting over six hours, the actual casualties were few.

Total American casualties due to gas attacks from 14 July through 20 July were 1,256. Somervall concludes that considering the intensity and duration of the German gas attack, that American troops were not entrenched, and the fact that only a few dugouts were completed and serviceable, "the showing of the division is very good---an opinion concurred in by all observers who were on the ground."⁴⁸

⁴⁸Major W.M. Somervall, "Report of Gas Attack July 14-15, 1918," RG 120, National Archives.

In his preliminary report of 23 July Brigadier General Crawford, commander of the 6th Brigade, 3rd I.D., stated that up until around the first of July the German Air Force in the Marne sector had little opposition, flying their missions freely over the 30th Infantry's area of operations. The result was accurate German intelligence as to where to concentrate their artillery fire; the 30th Division's trench fortifications and troops were subsequently fired upon with deadly precision, as was the entire subsector of the regiment. Crawford wrote of the fighting:

...When the attack began the defense was automatic. It was a platoon commander's fight....It would seem that soon after the bombardment opened, midnight or five minutes later, the enemy began his crossing operations which was vigorously opposed all along the front of the Brigade. Due to the configuration of the ground the 38th Infantry was more successful than the 30th in preventing the crossing so that not as many crossed east of Mezy as did down the river from that town.

It was a free for all fight with small units in the dark, doing great execution to the enemy and throwing his plans into complete confusion.

They [the Germans] attempted to organize their mixed troops, but the frontal fire delivered by the 30th Infantry, the section of the units near the river, and the fire from the heights above Moulins and the slopes south produced as much confusion and dismay that the Germans who were shock troops of the best quality and highest spirits in the German Army surrendered in groups of all sizes and individuals. Resistance ceased, they threw down their arms and

became anxious only that they be taken to the rear.⁴⁹

Colonel T.M. Anderson, commander of the 7th Infantry Regiment, on 17 July 1918 wrote a report praising one of his officers, Lt. H.L. White, for heroic actions between 14-17 July. On the morning of the 16th Lt. White was ordered "to take the 3rd Platoon of M Company and take up position on the hill in front of Bois D' Aigremont at all costs." Along the way White and his men found wounded Americans as well as Germans, a swath of ground near Mezy strewn with dead Germans, and two Maxim Guns. In one instance, as German soldiers tried to cross the Marne in boats and over bridges, they had to turn back because "the 7th Infantry's fire that turned loose on them was so hot that the enemy could not hold their position." All that and more occurred during intense German artillery bombardment. In his report, Lt. White wrote:

We have been under heavy shell fire from the Boche ever since the night of the 14th, and have had nothing to eat or drink, nor have we had any sleep since that time. My men were exhausted and they sat down, not being able to stand any longer, with their bayonets toward the Boche and said: "Let them come." They were so weak they could not stand, but were there ready to receive them when they arrived. Their orders were "To hold at all costs" and they did hold.

⁴⁹Brigadier General C. Crawford, "Preliminary Report of Battle of July 15, 1918." RG 120, National Archives.

All the men on the front line were absolutely exhausted. They have been put on the front line and won't move back at any cost. Corporal Brice, Company M [7th Infantry Regiment], accompanied all patrols that were sent out from my platoon and his work was very commendable.

Lt. White goes on to describe the murderous artillery of the Germans. Although the Americans were taking hundreds of casualties due to exposure from a lack of trench fortifications, he wrote that "This regiment has not only held its ground, which it was told to hold at all costs, but it has even taken over ground that was not expected of it....I consider the action of this shell-torn and gas-shattered regiment most commendable, even deserving of the highest praise."⁵⁰

On 18 July an American patrol combing the woods just south of Mezy where the Boche, attacking three days earlier, were driven back revealed that approximately five-thousand German soldiers had been killed that first day of battle. The German dead, piled three and four deep, was proof to the Americans that men vs. machine-guns is a struggle best left alone. If the ratio in World War I was one killed for every four wounded, then the total number of German casualties would likely have been 20,000. Even the

⁵⁰Colonel T.M. Anderson, Jr., "Galveston P.C. 18: 40 h. 17 July, 1918." RG 120, National Archives.

Kaiser's tough 10th Guard Division did not escape the wrath of the 3rd Division: the entire 10th Guard, one of five that attacked, engaged from across the Marne and but a few made it back to their original position on the north bank.

German prisoners taken after the first day of battle testified that an entire battalion of the 10th Guard was destroyed and the remaining battalion was left with only company strength.

One reason the Boche suffered such terrible losses on the first day was that due to such large numbers of Germans in the attack, the Americans pulled back into the woods where they might better hold their position. Outwitting their enemy, the Americans enticed German troops over prearranged areas where small squads of men lay hidden in a plethora of nests: as the Germans passed by the Americans were able to open fire at will.⁵¹

Advancing from the region of Jaulgonne after intense artillery bombardment five German divisions attacked the Americans, advancing about two and a half miles in approximately three hours. On the night of the fifteenth American forces destroyed the German pontoon bridges and took 1,500 prisoners, including an entire German Brigade Staff. The French commander in the area, General DeGoutte

⁵¹*The New York Times*, 19 July 1918.

(6th French Army), lauded the American troops after they drove the Germans back to the railway that fringed the Marne. The German attack on the fifteenth was launched in territory where Attila, the dynamic Hun leader, met disaster: the Catalunian Fields. The Germans chose that territory for its straight roads, as they would be imperative for their drive to Paris. As the Germans did in 1916 at Verdun they struck left and right, alternately, as a means to overwhelm the enemy and reach Paris. The extreme limits of the German offensive were in the west, in the vicinity of Chateau-Thierry; in the east a fight with the French---and the 28th Pennsylvania National Guard Division---raged at Main de Massiges. A French official made a statement on 15 July concerning the day's actions:

The German attack launched this morning at 4:30 o'clock continued throughout the day on both sides of Rheims with equal violence. West of Rheims desperate engagements were fought...south of the Marne, which the enemy succeeded in crossing...A spirited counterattack carried out by American troops drove back on the right bank of the river enemy contingents...Between Dormans and Rheims the Franco-Italian troops reacted with tenacity...The enemy multiplied his efforts...in the regions north of Prosnes and Souain, but was not able, despite repeated attacks, to cut into our combat positions.⁵²

⁵²*The Washington Post*, 16 July 1918.

Major Guy Rowe, commander of the Second Battalion of the 38th Infantry Regiment, held a position just east of Mezy on a stretch of railroad line. Resolved to hold the line until the last man Captain Jesse Woolridge, under Rowe's command, assembled a command of approximately two hundred men and took position among the rocky terrain of Mezy. Three counterattacks later he managed to detain around three hundred German prisoners. Directly east of Woolridge was the 125th French division which, soon after the first indications of an all out German assault, retreated for about five miles to the south. When doing so they failed to inform the members of the (attached) American 28th Division. Many from the 28th were killed or taken prisoner that day. It is no wonder they earned the nickname the 'Bleeding Keystone Division'.⁵³ As a result of the French retreat the German 36th Division in that sector captured Varennes and continued their southward advance until finally stopped by Co. F of the 38th Infantry Regiment. Now being attacked from not only their frontal and western flanks, the 38th Infantry Regiment also had to contend with a German assault on their eastern flank. Surrounded, the 38th would fight it out with the Boche until

⁵³Headquarters Third Division (Reg.), American Expeditionary Forces, "Report of Lt. W.M.R. Crossman, Company 'L', 109th Inf., July 16, 1918," RG 120, National Archives.

finally withdrawing and reorganizing their companies to continue the fight another day.⁵⁴ Kurt Hesse, a soldier in the German 5th Grenadier Regiment, wrote of the days events. After being assured on 30 May by the Kaiser that "To-morrow [*sic*] we shall march on Paris", Hesse wrote of the reality of the situation on the Marne that day:

Scarcely ever have I experienced such a dark night as the one from July 14th to 15th....The air filled with gas. The hardships for our men were enormous.... At last! A mad artillery fire started....The enemy had begun [artillery bombardment]....No word has come yet, if the crossing has succeeded....The attack has halted. A strong enemy prevents farther advance....The [artillery] striking in the forest is terrible, nerve-racking....Put on the gas masks! One could not see anything before---now still less! Many are seized with a dull despair.

He continues describing the events of those terrible days in mid-July: Gas, deafening artillery, black of night being lighted up from high explosive shells, and the screams of his wounded and dying comrades. He and his comrades hoped for a rest because "A day like the 15th of July affects body and nerves for weeks", and the

...infinitely dear comrades we had left over there [on the other side of the Marne]. Many of them we had not been able to lay in the earth....Then the report

⁵⁴Dickman, 96-102

reached us: trouble to the right. The enemy, enormously strong, has attacked from the woods of Villers-Cotterets....We must go back.⁵⁵

The casualties sustained by the 38th on the first day of fighting accounted for about 25 percent of the entire divisional strength; it is a tribute to the overall command of the division that the number of casualties were not greatly increased. Pershing would later write that "a single regiment of the Third Division wrote one of the most brilliant pages in the annals of military history in preventing the crossing [of Germans] at certain points on its front, while on either side the Germans, who had gained a footing, pressed forward." From the French command the 38th received the Croix de Guerre as well as a citation, which read:⁵⁶

A superior regiment which, under the energetic and able command of its chief, Colonel McAlexander, gave proof of unshakeable tenacity in the course of the German onset of the 15th of July, 1918. Attacked in front and outflanked on the right and left for several kilometers, it remained, in spite of everything, on the bank of the Marne, faithful to its mission, and repulsed the enemy, superior in number, taking from him more than two hundred prisoners.

⁵⁵Charles F. Horne and Walter F. Austin, *Source Records of The Great War*, vol. VI-1918, *The Year of Victory* (Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1931), 248-258.

⁵⁶Dickman, 101-102.

As of 16 July 1918 along the American lines on the Marne, the Kaiser's troops in some places were held back and in other places were completely repulsed, retreating to their original positions. The German pursuit of their overall objective, Paris, let alone gaining much ground toward that end, was all but halted. Counterattacks by the allies to the southwest of Jaulgonne retook territory the Germans had taken just one day prior; territory in the Marne sector changed sides many times since the first day of battle. During the fifth and final offensive of Operation Michael German troop morale was at a steady decline: since the 15th the Germans were repeatedly beaten back, were suffering enormous losses, and had no hope for reinforcements. Germany's manpower had run out; in the area of the Marne, the German High Command's plan had seemingly run its course.

Chateau-Thierry was the point at which the Germans had hoped to pivot their forces and move westward toward Paris. As of 16 July not only had they failed to achieve that swing but, moreover, were driven back to their original lines of departure, just north of the Marne River. Edwin L. James, in an article of 17 July 1918 in the *New York Times*, writes of the individual heroism that the American fighting man possessed:

Nineteen [Americans] of a platoon were left in a certain position. There they stayed...until all their ammunition was gone. Then...they leaped forward with fixed bayonets and charged the German machine guns. The [German] crews took one glance at those bayonets...and stepped out into the open, hands above their heads, yelling 'Kamerad!' The nineteen [Americans] brought them back; there were thirty-eight of them [German P.O.W.'s].

Also on the 16th many more German prisoners were taken as the American army on the Marne counterattacked. From St. Agnon-La Chapelle the Americans pushed the German forces back a little over a mile. At the southward bend in the Marne, between Fossoy and Joulgonne, the German forces had been routed and the area cleaned of all enemy opposition. Just south of the river, where the railroad parallels the bend of the Marne, American artillery and airplanes destroyed all remaining German troops within that sector of fighting; breaking all that was left of German resistance, the Americans east of Reims, in conjunction with the French forces in that sector, helped to further stabilize the precarious situation on that front. James continues writing that "There is no equal in France for the American soldier at close range, and that is how the foe must meet him in the days to come." The American fighters are *individuals*

and "They never quit. As a German General reported to the Crown Prince...they 'kill or are killed.'" ⁵⁷

⁵⁷*The New York Times*, 17 July 1918.

CHAPTER 3

FINAL BATTLES

As the Second Battle of the Marne came to an end another was just beginning: The Aisne-Marne operation that raged from 18 July to 6 August 1918. Marshal Foch, fully aware of the progress the Germans had made in the Champagne sector, planned for a French-A.E.F. attack to be conducted on the western bank of the Marne Salient, on the Boche lines between the Marne and the Aisne. If the Germans lost their principal railroad and Soissons, thereby losing their supply of weapons and equipment supporting their positions along the Marne (south) and Aisne (north), they would be forced to pull back from the western front of the Marne Salient. Marshal Petain would lead the attack and, if successful, would thereby officially end the German threat of taking Paris. The mission of the 3rd ID, by 18 July holding a position from Fossoy to the west and extending to Launay to the east, was to prevent the Germans' passage of the Marne and protect the Surmeiln Valley from any further German incursion.

The French opened on 18 July what some have dubbed 'the beginning of the end' for Germany's military forces, and the war. The XX French Corps led the attack from the

Red Forest and, moving east, five days later the objective, the Soissons-Chateau Thierry highway, was taken. In vain, though swift and determined, the Germans moved forward thousands of disciplined, experienced troops. Perhaps unaware of the great opportunity available to him, Foch's counter-offensive on the 18th was superb from the start. There were two main reasons the offensive was so successful: the first was that the commander of the German 7th Army, General Max von Boehm, was expecting the attack to come from the south and, second, the German communications were parallel to their forward position, exactly what the French had destroyed.⁵⁸ Contributing in the French westward attack was the American IV Corps, commanded by Major General Robert Lee Bullard, comprised of the 1st and 2nd Divisions. Also taking part in the attack was the 1st Moroccan Division as well as the French 58th and 69th Divisions.⁵⁹

On 21 July the 3rd ID reported that the Germans were retreating along their entire front. During this time the divisions' mission was to cross the Marne, gain contact with the Germans and inflict as many losses and casualties

⁵⁸Charles F. Horne and Walter F. Austin, *Source Records of The Great War*, vol. VI-1918, *The Year of Victory* (Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1931), 259-265.

⁵⁹John S.D. Eisenhower with Joanne Thompson Eisenhower, *Yanks: The Epic Story of The American Army in World War I* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 166.

as possible, and continue forcing the Germans to retreat.⁶⁰ The division continued in this manner, contacting and engaging the enemy as they pushed northwestward, throughout July and into early August.⁶¹ The 3rd was subsequently ordered on 12 July to Grodencourt, where it exercised training and maneuver operations, as well as recuperated; on 4 September it was transferred to Vaucoulers until finally, on 10 September 1918, the 3rd ID moved into the line as reserves in support of the 42nd (Rainbow), the 1st, and the 89th American Divisions. On 11 September the A.E.F., for the first time, fought as an entirely independent army commanded only by American officers: St Mihiel, unbeknownst at the time, was America's opening act for future engagements on the European continent.⁶²

It is of interest to note that around this time General Ludendorff no longer had confidence in his troops. The failed Michael Offensive, the Germans' defeat of 15-17 July, and the subsequent retreat throughout July and August demoralized his exhausted soldiers: his *Sturmstruppen* were all but annihilated during the spring offensives and what was left were soldiers less disciplined and of lower

⁶⁰J.W. Stewart, "Operations, July 14-30, 1918," RG 120, National Archives.

⁶¹U.S. Department of The Army: Office of Military History, *United States Army in The World War, 1917-1919*, vol. 5 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948), 597-616.

⁶²"St. Mihiel Operations: August 10, 1918 to September 16, 1918," RG 120, National Archives.

morale. Marshal Paul von Hindenberg, as a means to invigorate and rally his army, issued an address on 6 September 1918. It reads, in part:

We are in the midst of a heavy battle with the foe. If numerical superiority alone were to guarantee victory, then Germany would long since have been crushed to the ground. The enemy knows, however, that Germany and her allies can never be vanquished by arms alone.

...In the east we have forged peace, and in the west we are strong enough to do the same despite the Americans. But we must be strong and united.

Why does the enemy incite colored races against the German soldiers? Because he wishes to annihilate us.

The enemy also endeavors to sow dissension in our ranks...leaflets dropped from aeroplanes...There have always been some traitors in the Fatherland...Most of these now reside in neutral countries...to escape being executed as traitors.

Be on your guard, German soldiers.⁶³

The St. Mihiel assault of 12 September saw a unified, U.S. commanded offensive with French troops---for the first time---being led by American officers into battle. Five-hundred thousand Americans supported by one-hundred thousand French troops battled back German soldiers for fifteen miles, to just south of Verdun: Pershing's earlier insistence on individual, open-area fighting proved to be correct. Capturing German strongholds well ahead of schedule, the A.E.F.'s offensive disrupted the German

⁶³Horne and Austin, 282.

retreat to such an extent that Allied commanders argued that only by continuing the assault could they achieve a major breakthrough: continuing the assault on confused German soldiers would deny them any chance of reorganizing their defenses. The seemingly endless list of problems that earlier in 1917 strained American leadership seemed to disappear; the U.S. Army, apparently, had overcome its earlier problems of training, supply, and logistics. The St. Mihiel Salient, that territory in France known as the Woevre,⁶⁴ was taken. The first truly American operation was a complete success.⁶⁵

By the night of 13 September the St. Mihiel operation was essentially over, as the last remaining pockets of German resistance were being eliminated; the salient was sealed earlier in the day and all remaining enemy troops therein had been killed or taken as prisoners of war. On 16 September 1918 the battle for the St. Mihiel Salient was officially over. The operation was so successful and the loss of American troops so little, it is arguable that the push could have successfully continued forward and the German lines of communication taken out at Briey. However, Allied plans called for those same American divisions so

⁶⁴Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), 135.

⁶⁵Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York, et. al.: Rowman & Littlefield), 97-99.

successful in the St. Mihiel drive to be committed to the next operation, the Meuse-Argonne.⁶⁶ However successful the St. Mihiel operation had been at driving the enemy back, German artillery and air power was still very active. Up to this point the First American Army had suffered approximately 100,000 casualties: fighting in heavily wooded areas and against strongly held trenches and fortifications made unavoidable such losses.

The biggest battle the American Army fought during the war was the Meuse-Argonne campaign: an area from just west of Verdun to a little east of Soissons. Extraordinary efforts involved superb planners, and the movement of troops---a shift of over forty miles from the St. Mihiel Front to a sector northwest paralleling the west bank of the Meuse---and supplies fell to the responsibility of the Operations Officer of the First Army, Colonel George C. Marshall. Completed in just under two weeks, the move was as bold as it was remarkable: over only three roads and confined to the cover of darkness, 600,000 American, 220,000 French and Italian troops as well as 3,000 guns and 40,000 tons of supplies made their way to the west bank of the Meuse. Marshall Foch's objective was clear: cutting the

⁶⁶Joseph T. Dickman, *The Great Crusade* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co., 1927), 157-159.

essential German rail lines and forcing them back, across the Hindenburg Line, inside their own territory by the end of the year.⁶⁷

The Americans went 'over the top' at 5:30 a.m. on 26 September: the First American Army in the center, III Corps in the east, and I Corps to the west. In support of I Corps was the fledgling 1st Tank Brigade, commanded by Lt. Colonel George S. Patton. This was the first time tanks had been used in such difficult conditions. The French small, two-man Renaults and a few of the heavier French Schneider's provided infantry support, as Patton advanced the tank force as an independent dimension of warfare: the tanks were to be used in a concentrated fashion in support of infantry rather than piecemeal amongst individual infantry units.⁶⁸

After a brief setback, the 1st Tank brigade managed to destroy the German machine-guns; eventually, due to mechanical troubles and enemy action, the strength of the force was severely reduced. Although a minor one, the 1st

⁶⁷U.S. Army Center of Military History, "The U.S. Army in World War I, 1917-1918" (9 May 2006) <http://www.history.army.mil/books/amh-v2/PDF/Chapter01.pdf> (accessed 9 September 2007), 43-44.

⁶⁸*Part III: Argonne-Meuse Operation*, File 203-33.6, RG 120, National Archives.

Tank Brigade did indeed play a part in the general fighting in the Meuse-Argonne.⁶⁹

The first phase of the campaign planned for an axis of attack on the line Mountfacon-Romagne-Buzancy: if successful the Germans, after being pushed back in the center by American Third, Fifth, and First Corp's, would have to retreat from the Argonne without the burden of having the Americans to attack and clear such difficult terrain. Relentlessly the U.S. forces attacked and on the second day Mountfacon was taken, while in the Argonne American forces were encountering tenacious German resistance. During the battle the 3rd ID replaced the 79th ID and was forced to direct a frontal assault against a determined, hostile enemy: subjected to artillery and cross-fire the Americans, especially those in the center positions, suffered heavily.⁷⁰ It is debatable that, had the veteran 3rd ID been rotated earlier into the front line, Mountfacon would have fallen on the first day: if the divisions' combat reputation theretofore held weight---"it may be killed but it cannot be conquered"---it likely would

⁶⁹Eisenhower, 213-218.

⁷⁰Thomas G. Frothingham, *The American Reinforcement in The World War* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1927; reprint, 1971), 349-351.

have suffered heavy, heavy casualties.⁷¹ Writing of the battle that day, General Pershing reported that

The assault of 26 September surprised the Germans and disrupted their defense, but this situation was only momentary. From that day on the fighting was probably unsurpassed during the World War for dogged determination on both sides. Each foot of ground was stubbornly contested and hostile troops took advantage of every available spot from which to pour enfilade and crossfire into the advancing American troops....⁷²

3 October 1918 marked the second phase of the Meuse-Argonne struggle. Honed by experience the Americans knew that it was the second assault against the by now reinforced, after a few days' lull in the fighting, fortified enemy that would require the hardest fighting. Supported by numerous French tank battalions the 3rd ID launched its attack on 4 October, its objectives being Bois de Ogons, Bois de Cunel, and the heights just east of Romagne. By 11 a.m. Bois de Cunel had been reached but not taken; heavy German machine-gun fire halted the Americans, and communications were hampered due to weather and human error. German planes machine-gunned the 30th Infantry

⁷¹Jesse W. Woolridge, *The Giants of The Marne* (Copyright: Jesse W. Woolridge, 1923),

⁷²Laurence Stallings, *The Doughboys: The Story of The AEF, 1917-1918* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 247-248.

Regiment as it tried to move forward, although two of the planes were shot down by superbly accurate small-arms fire.

The forward line of the 3rd ID continued to advance slowly on 5 October: bitter and stubborn German resistance slowed their advance, particularly in the area of Bois de Cunel. An Adjutant of the 5th Brigade, 3rd ID, reported that "Three times the infantry tried to advance across the field into Bois de Cunel, and each time the line melted away. This space was thoroughly covered by machine gun [*sic*] fire."⁷³

On 7 October the 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd ID, discontinued its direct assault on the Bois de Cunel, instead reorganizing for an attack in the northern edge of the Argonne: after three gallant attempts on 6 October, under deadly machine-gun fire, to overrun the Bois de Cunel, the twenty or so men of Company C (same regiment) were withdrawn for a later attack on the Bois de Beuge. Throughout the 7th and 8th American artillery continued to barrage the enemy: rolling barrages harassed the German positions from just south of the Bois de Cunel and continued in a northerly direction past the Germans' Mamelle Trench Line. Men from the 30th and 38th Infantry Regiments were sent forward and suffered heavy casualties

⁷³*Part III: Argonne-Meuse Operation*, 1-8.

from German machine-gun fire; the 38th Regiments line was now only a mere seventy-five yards from the German line. High Explosive shells and Phosgene gas was used on the German line: units of the 3rd ID were finally able to overcome the Germans and take on the 9th the Mamelle Trench as well as the Bois de Cunel. As the 3rd advanced slowly under heavy machine-gun fire they finally crossed the Hindenburg Line on 9 October 1918: that windy, elongated honeycomb of defenses, so easily defended due to the rolling ground and the ability of the Germans to use such terrain, was breached.

11 October brought renewed American attacks that, while no immediate material signs were made, continued to further demoralize, strain, and exhaust a retreating German Army. American lines were improved and prisoners taken: interrogation reports determined that entire regiments of the German Army were dissipating in the face of the American onslaught. By the morning of 12-13 October the 3rd ID had secured a line from Cirges-Romagne Road to a position very near the Meuse River.⁷⁴

After forty-seven days of intense combat involving over one-million American troops, suffering 117,000 casualties, the Americans pushed back forty-three German

⁷⁴*Ibid*, 8-13.

divisions over a distance of thirty miles, capturing over 400 enemy guns and killing or wounding over 120,000 German troops.⁷⁵

The war did not go quietly: the final six months of the war were worse than the previous years of constant stalemate as the men had, finally, come out of the trenches. Hostilities officially ended on 11 November 1918 and the Germans on 28 June 1919 signed the Treaty of Versailles, exactly five years to the day Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian's bullet. A total of 9,469,982 Americans would serve during the war: the U.S. suffered 116,516 deaths and another 204,002 casualties. 53,402 were battle deaths and more than 63,000 deaths were categorized as "other deaths".⁷⁶ The war in the United States was quickly forgotten, however, and remains the first 'forgotten war' of 20th Century U.S. history.

⁷⁵U.S. Army Center of Military History, "The U.S. Army in World War I, 1917-1918" (9 May 2006) <http://www.history.army.mil/books/amh-v2/PDF/Chapter01.pdf> (accessed 9 September 2007), 49.

⁷⁶"Principal Wars in which the United States Participated: U.S. Military Personnel serving and casualties," in DoD Personnel and Procurement Statistics, <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/CASUALTY/WCPRINCIPAL.pdf>, (accessed 10 March 2007).

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